

Southeastern National Estuarine Research Reserves

Green Industry Survey: Preliminary Report

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In February 2010, the Southeastern National Estuarine Research Reserves (SE NERRs) hosted a conference entitled *Controlling Invasives and Promoting Natives through Collaborative Efforts in the Southeast*. The spread of invasive plant species is a significant concern worldwide, and was also identified as a priority topic that the southeast reserves felt they needed to address regionally. Many agencies and organizations exist in this region which, through working together, have the capacity to address the spread of invasives. The objective of the conference was to provide an opportunity to discuss on-the-ground actions, coordinate efforts, and share methods for addressing invasive plants in the southeast by providing focused breakout groups and panel-led discussions for participants. In preparation for one of the themes discussed during this conference, the SE NERRs conducted a regional survey of nursery (green) industry professionals.

The Green Industry Survey was a collaborative approach in initiating conversation with green industry professionals. This survey serves as a primary assessment tool to better understand the perceived issues in phasing out invasives and promoting natives in the nursery industry. The survey also provided an opportunity to open communication between nursery professionals and local reserves, which will help with future efforts that seek to engage nurseries in efforts to address invasive plants. This report will describe the survey, highlight results utilizing descriptive statistics and draw on some preliminary conclusions and discussion points.

Green Industry Survey Background

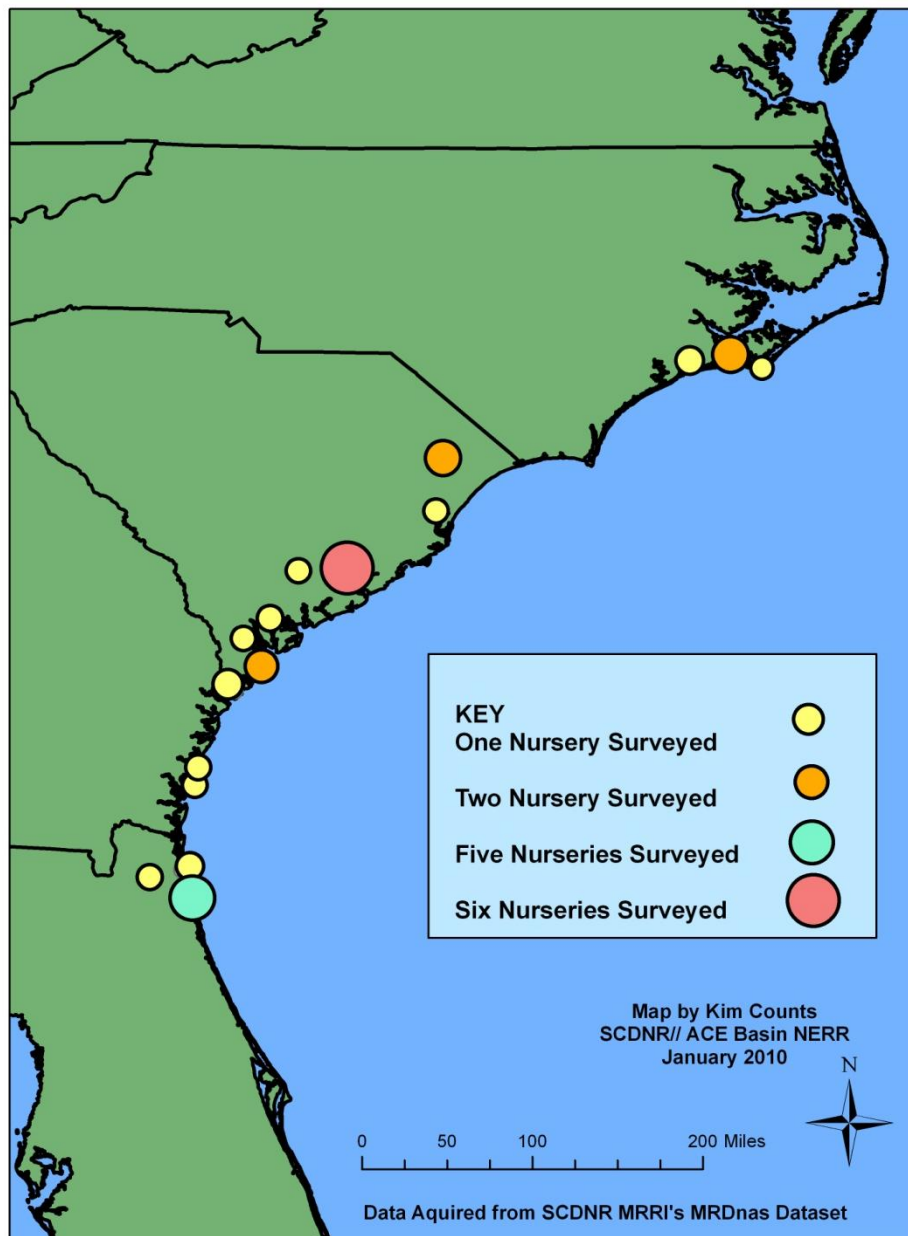
The survey provided an opportunity for the SE NERR's to collaborate and share ideas and opinions amongst each other on the subject of invasive plant species. The following are those that participated in creating, facilitating and compiling results of the nursery survey:

- North Carolina NERR: Whitney Jenkins
- North Inlet Winyah Bay NERR: Nicole Saladin, Dr. Jennifer Plunket, and Lindsay Thomas
- Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto River (ACE) Basin NERR: Rebekah Walker Szivak, Stefanie Simpson, Kim Counts, Dr. Elizabeth Wenner, Maia Ingle and Jennifer Ness
- Sapelo Island NERR: Suzanne VanParreren
- Guana Tolomato Mantanzas (GTM) NERR: Emily Montgomery
- The Nature Conservancy: Colette Degarady

The survey was administered during October and November of 2009. The total number of surveys/participating nurseries was 28 (North Carolina 4, South Carolina 14, Georgia 3, and Florida 7). Of the 28 nurseries, one was a big box store, and the rest were local nurseries. Survey sites were selected on proximity to NERR sites and demonstrated interest by the nursery. Therefore participation in the survey was self-selecting and not necessarily a representative sample. While the survey

responses were not representative of the entire industry, the NERRs planned to use this survey as an initial effort to gain insight into the dynamics of the invasive/native plant issues in coastal southeast nurseries. Figure I depicts the general location of participating nurseries in the green industry survey.

Figure I: SE NERR's Green Industry Survey Sites: 2009



The survey contained 35 questions, predominantly closed-ended. The primary objective of the survey was to gain feedback from nurseries on perceived issues of phasing out the sale of invasive plant species and promoting the sale of natives in the nursery industry. The survey was designed in such a way as to

facilitate open communication between the reserves and the local nurseries. The sections of the survey are as follows:

- Section 1: Assessment of Other Efforts
- Section 2: Assessment of General Knowledge of Invasive Species Issues
- Section 3: Knowledge of and Access to Native Plants and Native Landscaping
- Section 4: Access to and Willingness to Promote Native Plants in Your Business
- Section 5: Employee Training on Invasive and Native Species
- Section 6: Assessment of Public Demand for Natives
- Section 7: Assessment of Perceived Barriers to Selling/Using Native Plants

Survey Results

Section 1: Assessment of Other Efforts

In section one, participants were asked if their nursery had previously been contacted about invasives species or native plant issues. A majority of selected nurseries had never been contacted before. If the participant responded that they had, they were asked by whom. Figure II and Table I depict these results.

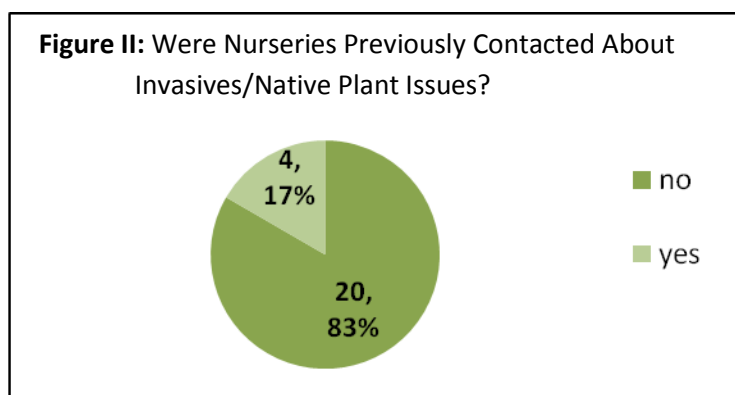
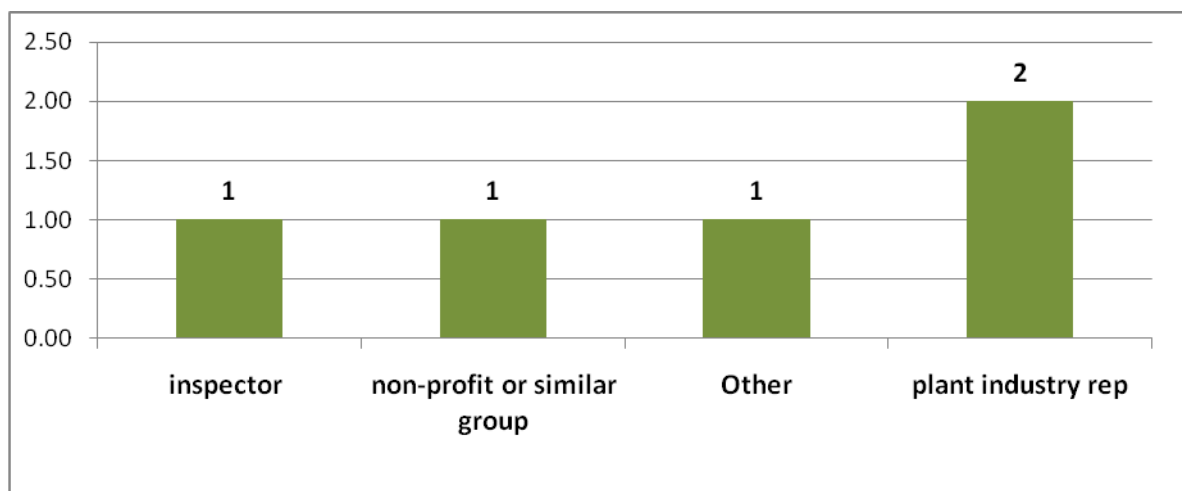


Table I: By Whom Nurseries Were Nurseries Contacted Regarding Invasives/Native Plant Issues?



Section 2: Assessment of General Knowledge of Invasive Species Issues

In section two, nursery professionals were asked about general knowledge pertaining to invasive species issues, including distinguishing definitions of natives, invasives, exotics, and naturalized species. Participants were also asked to identify perceived major issues caused by invasives. Responses were

divided among four categories; loss of native habitat, environmental degradation, threats to wildlife and habitat loss, and threat to forestry agriculture. The results are illustrated in Figure III and Figure IV.

Figure III: Familiarity of Participating Nursery Professionals with Definitions of Native, Invasive, Naturalized and Exotic Species

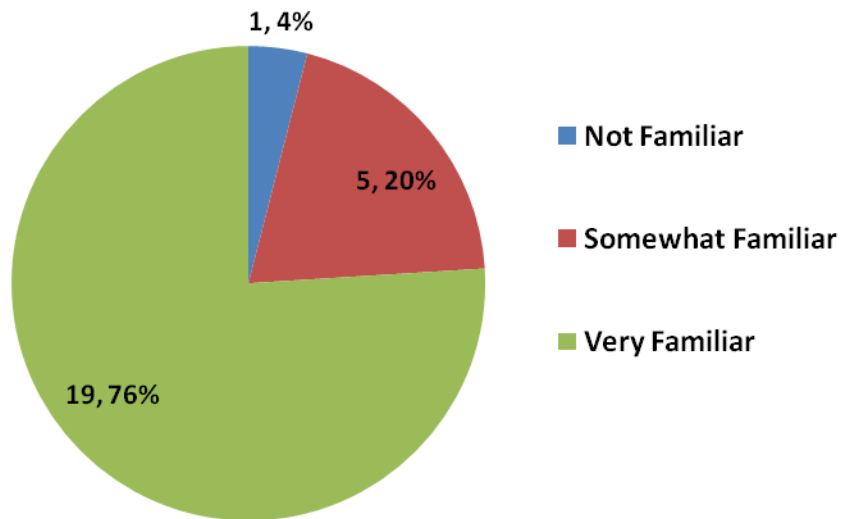
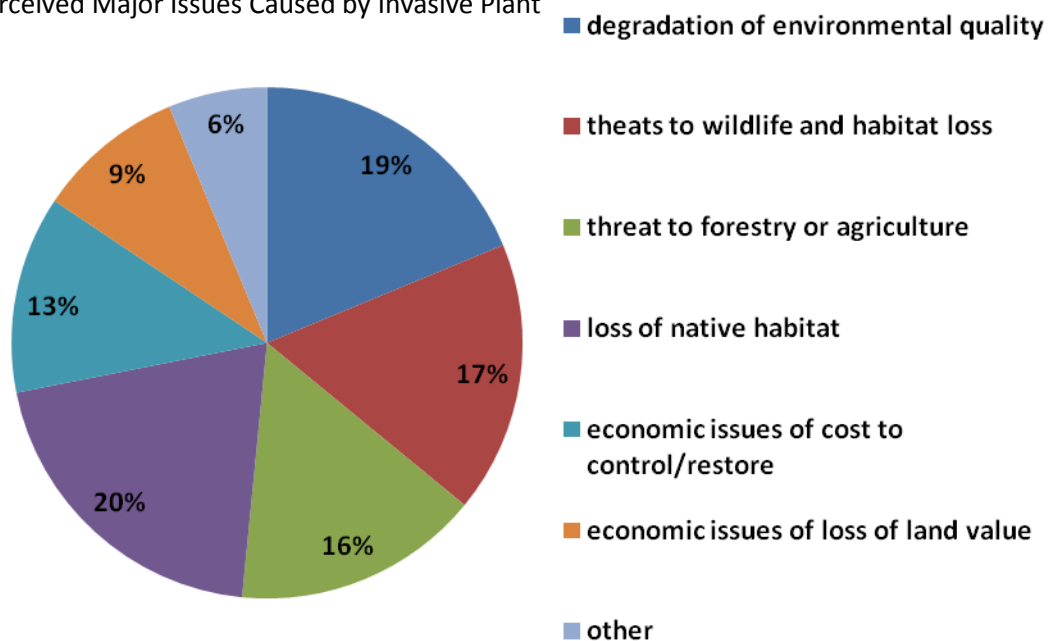
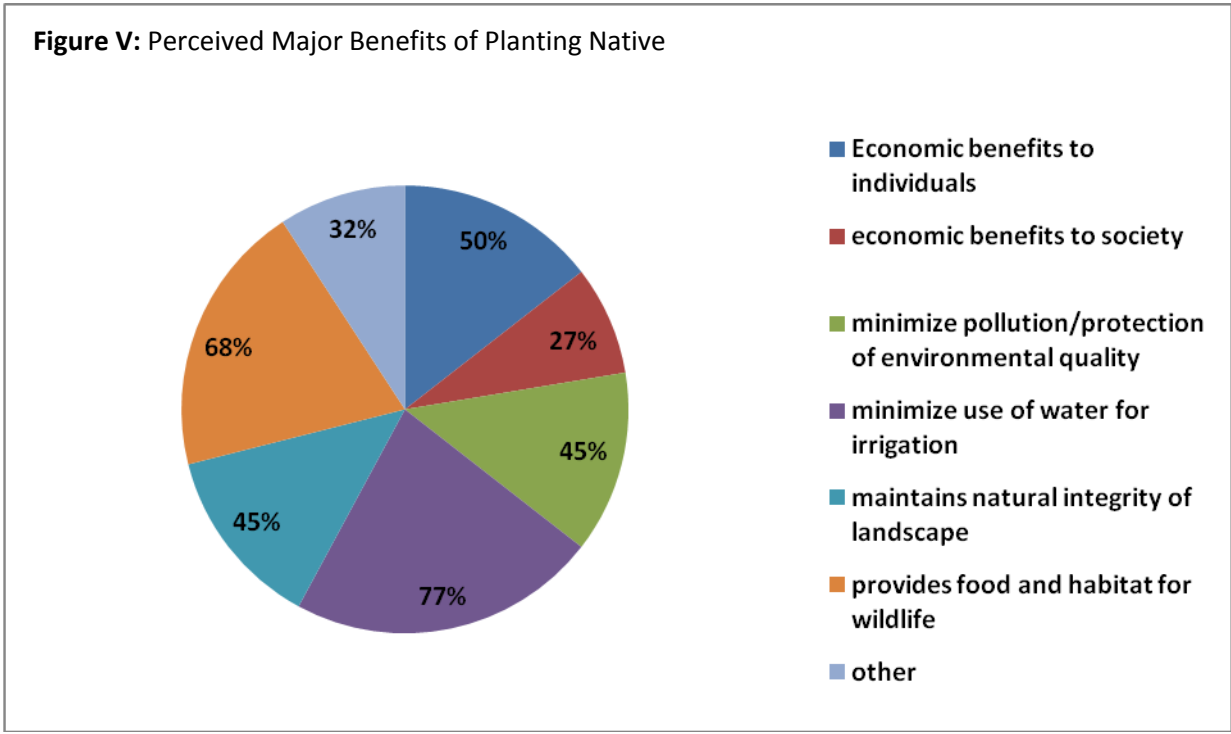


Figure IV: Perceived Major Issues Caused by Invasive Plant Species



Section 3: Knowledge of and Access to Native Plants and Native Landscaping

In section three, nursery professionals were asked to identify perceived major benefits of planting natives. Seventy seven percent, 77%, answered that a benefit of planting native species is that it minimizes irrigation used for plant maintenance. Half of participants responded that economic benefits exist for the individual in utilizing native plants. Also, food and habitat for wildlife (specifically deer), maintaining natural integrity and minimizing pollution were identified as benefits of native plants in the landscape. Results for this section are depicted in Figure V.



Section 4: Access to and Willingness to Promote Native Plants in Your Business

Section four provides information on native plant accessibility, willingness to promote natives, method of promoting natives, and preferences on format for future informational materials. Interestingly, only 44% of the nurseries surveyed said they label plants as native, while at the same time 67% said that labeling plants as natives helps them sell. Results of this section are depicted in Figures VI to Figure XII and Table II.

Figure VI: Does the Nursery Have Wholesalers Available Who that Provide

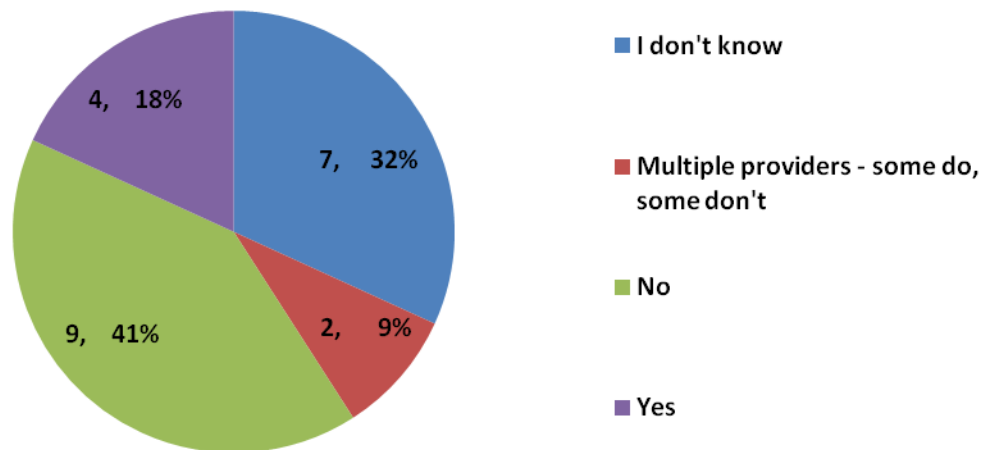


Figure VII: Plants Labeled As Native

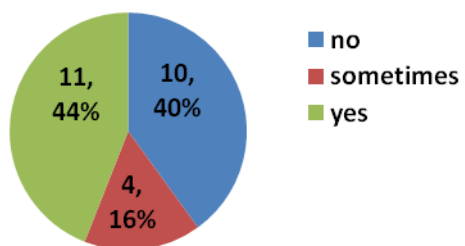


Figure VIII: Labeling Helps To Sell

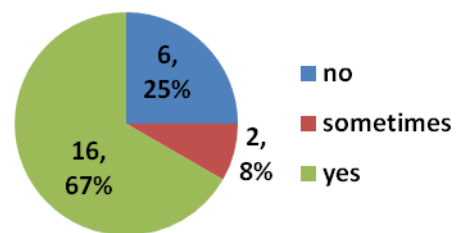


Figure IX: Interest in Promoting Natives in Business

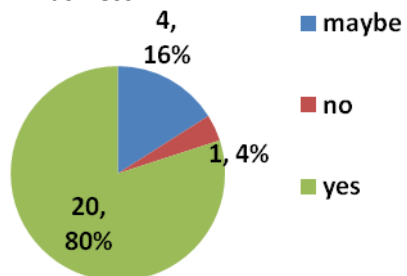


Figure X: Currently Provide Information to Customers to Highlight Benefits of Natives or Issues of Invasives

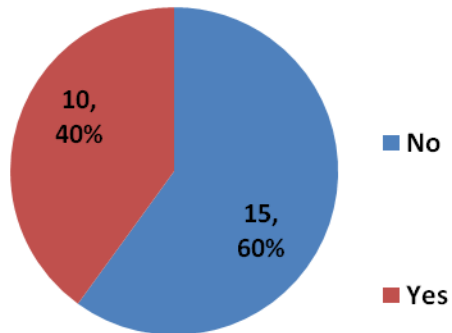


Figure XI: Willingness to Offer Information if Training was Provided

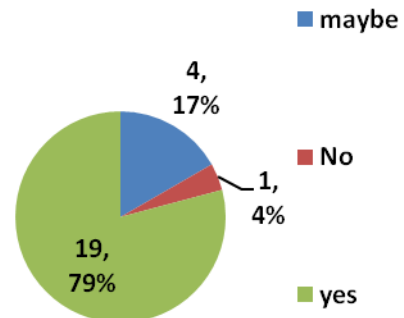


Table II: The Different Formats Used by Nurseries to Deliver Information to Customers

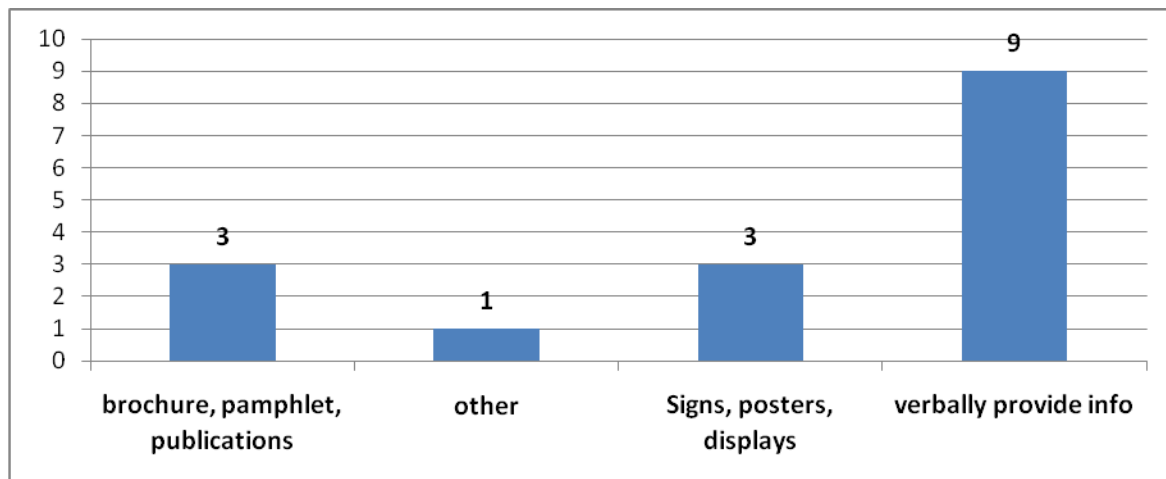
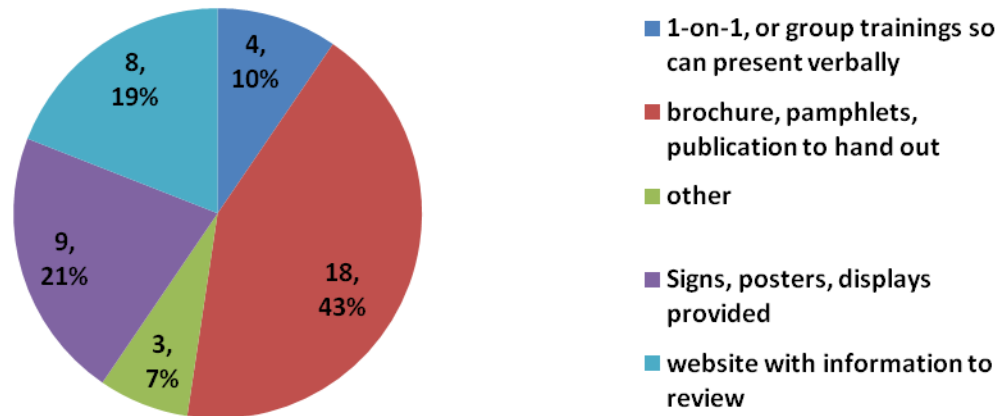


Figure XII: Preferred Format If Informational Materials Were Provided



Section 5: Employee Training on Invasive and Native Species

Section five provides information on existing employee training regarding benefits of natives and issues of invasive plant species. Green Industry Professionals were asked if they are interested in receiving additional training. When looking at interest for additional training, if definite affirmation responses are combined with maybe response, a near 90% interest rate is identified. Therefore, if a quality training product was created, based upon these responses, a high likelihood for use exists. Results are illustrated in Table III and Figures XIII and XIV.

Table III: Number of Nurseries Presently Providing Employee Training on Invasive/Native Plant Species

Topics

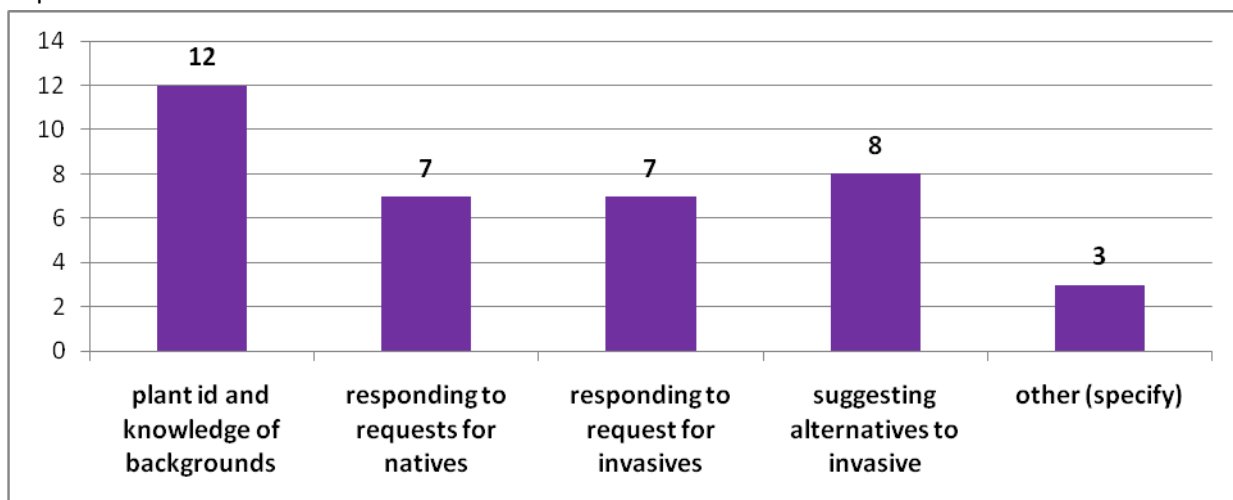


Figure XIV: Interest Existing for Training at Nurseries Who Do Not Provide Training Currently To Employees

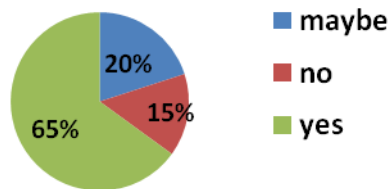
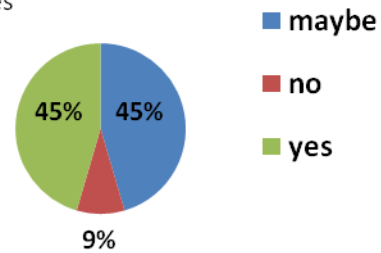


Figure XV: Interest Existing for Training at Nurseries Who Currently Provide Training to Employees



Section 6: Assessment of Public Demand for Natives

Section six provides information regarding the perceived demand for natives by nursery professionals. Results for this section are illustrated in Figures XVI to XVII and Table IV. A majority of the surveyed nurseries indicate customers do, in fact, demand natives, largely on a week to monthly basis, with about half indicating that they have not seen an increase in inquiries for natives from year to year, and another half indicating there is some or a definite increase.

Figure XVI: Nurseries with Customers that Presently Inquire About Native Plants

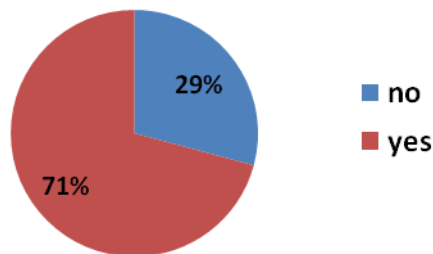


Table IV: Approximate Time Period in which Inquiries are Received

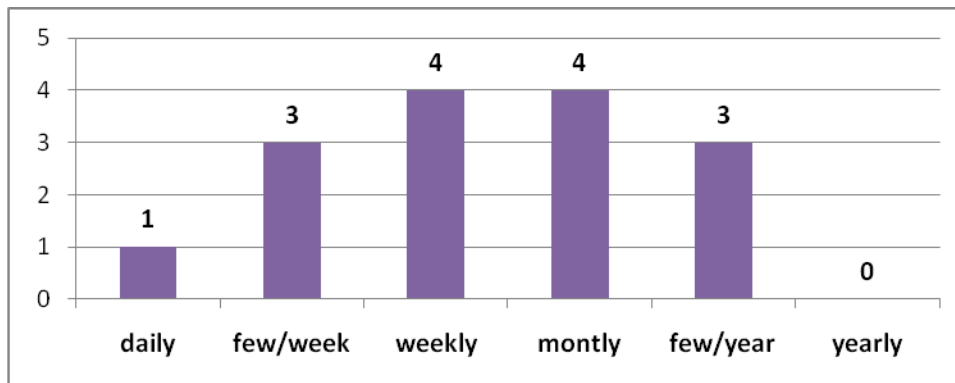
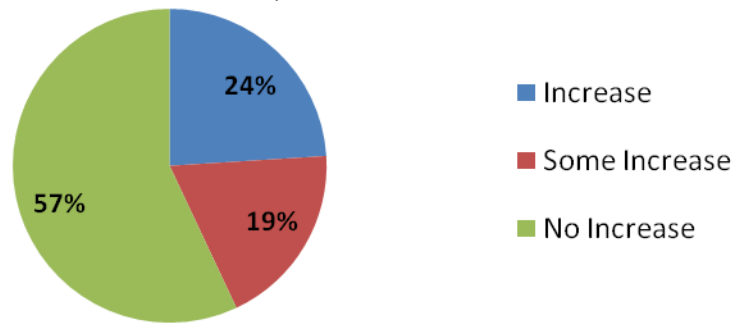


Figure XVII: Perceived Increase in Inquiries for Native Plants



Section 7: Assessment of Perceived Barriers to Selling/Using Native Plants

Section seven addresses the perceived barriers of phasing out invasives and promoting natives in the nursery industry. A general lack of interest is perceived as the biggest deterrent to promoting natives. Phasing out invasives has more perceived deterrents identified, such as lack of supply for alternatives, and lack of demand and interest. Results are illustrated in Table V and VI. Note: Variation between percentage scales of Table V and Table VI.

Table V: Major Perceived Deterrents in Promoting Native Plants in the Nursery Industry

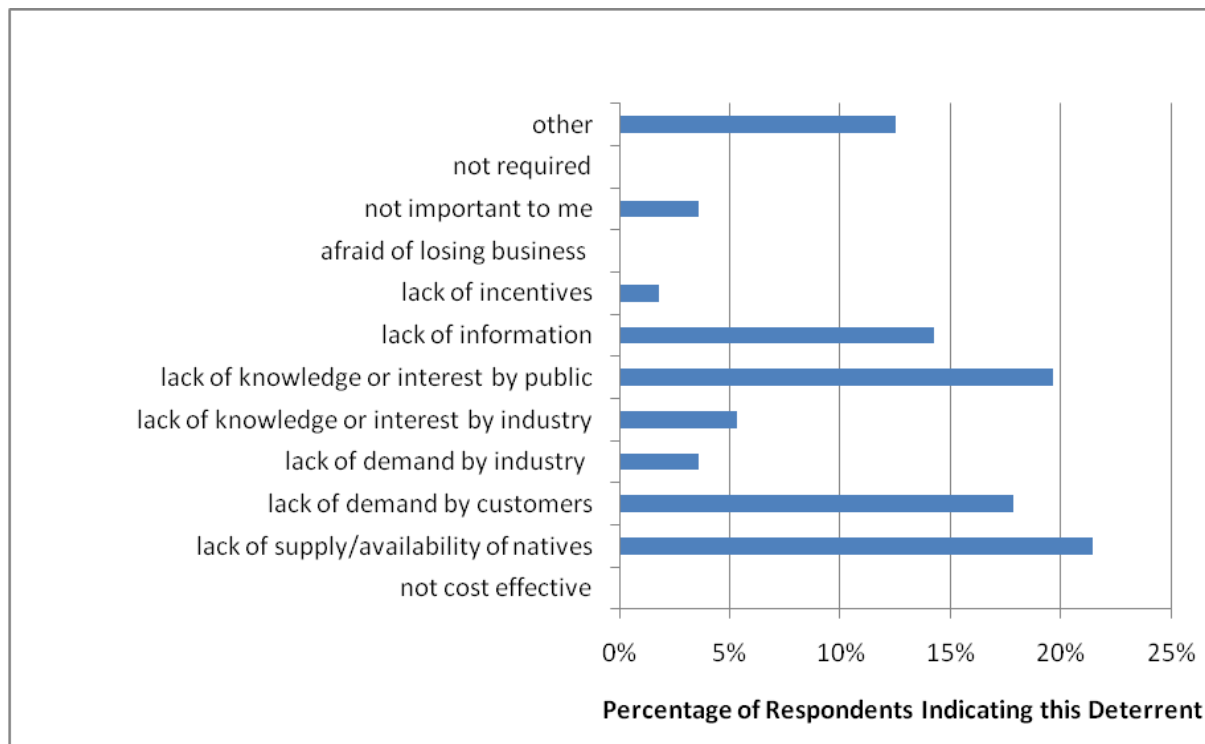
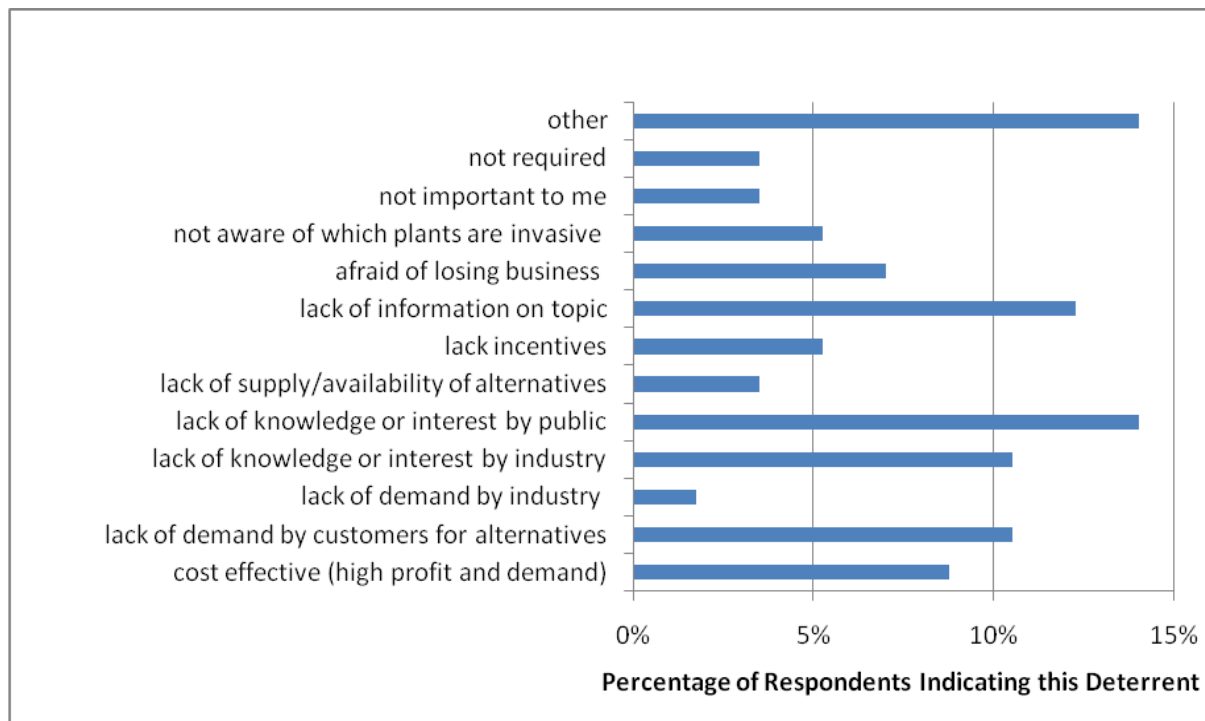


Table VI: Major Perceived Deterrents in Phasing Out Invasive Plants in the Nursery Industry



Conclusions

Before this survey, most nurseries that were contacted as a part of this effort had not previously been contacted regarding invasive plant issues. An obvious need was identified to develop additional forms of communication between the reserves, non-profit organizations (NPOs), the nursery industry and the public. An interest does exist by nursery industry professionals to promote natives and supply information regarding their benefits. The key factors in phasing out invasives as well as promoting natives appear to be a lack of demand for natives followed by a lack of supply for native alternatives to invasives.

This survey was an initial attempt to gather information from nursery professionals regarding the topic, and this preliminary data can be used to guide future efforts aimed at formatting and providing more information to this industry. However, a more in-depth survey that includes wholesalers and big box stores, as well as a larger sample size of local, independent nurseries would provide much more insight on invasive and native issues, and information from a larger survey would help refine efforts to address these issues. A larger scale survey would also be more consistent if only one surveyor is utilized and questions are revamped from the pilot survey. These efforts will create useable outputs for collaborative efforts by nursery professionals, NPOs, and the reserves in tackling the issue of sales of invasives plants. Survey outcomes combined with already existing information should be utilized to formulate trainings, workshops, outreach materials, and market design for green industry professionals.

For more information about the SE NERR green industry survey or report, please contact the following:

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